



DECISION MEMO

Washington Creek Culvert Replacement



USDA Forest Service, Northern Region
Nez Perce – Clearwater National Forest
North Fork Ranger District
Clearwater County, Idaho

I. Background

I have decided to approve Washington Creek Culvert Replacement project on the North Fork Ranger District, Nez-Perce-Clearwater National Forests, Clearwater County, Idaho. The project is located in Township 39 North, Range 6 East, Section 36, Boise Meridian. (See attached map).

II. Purpose and Need

Washington Creek, a tributary to the North Fork Clearwater River, provides habitat for sensitive westslope cutthroat trout. Forest Service Road 246 crosses Washington Creek at two sites, mileposts 10.3 and 10.5. Each site has 3 - 5 undersized culverts which prevent free passage of fish and other aquatic organisms, and allow wood and debris to collect at the inlets, resulting in high maintenance needs and a high risk of failure. Failure of the culverts at either of the sites would deliver considerable material to Washington Creek, impacting both the stream habitat and transportation system. In addition, the existing road crossings are highly susceptible to blow-out, a potential source of sediment to Forest Service stream habitat.

The project's purpose and need to replace the undersized culverts to reduce the need for recurring maintenance of the sites and reduce the potential risk of failure. In addition, the project is needed to provide free passage of fish and other aquatic organisms. By replacing the culverts 10 miles of open fish habitat downstream will be connected to six miles of habitat upstream. Though not currently proposed, future culvert replacements will provide an additional nine miles of connected habitat upstream.

Project Design / Equipment

The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests and Potlatch Corporation will replace the existing undersized culverts where Forest Service Road 246 crosses Washington Creek (mileposts 10.3 and 10.5) with bridges. The bridges will be designed to accommodate a 100-year stream flow event and to allow fish and other aquatic organisms, as well as woody debris, passage through the stream.

At each site, the stream will be dewatered so that construction work is isolated from flowing water. Settling basins or other methods will be used to ensure that muddy water does not return to the stream. Diversions will be installed, operated and removed such that erosion and sedimentation is minimized. A contractor will then remove the existing culverts, ensure the channel is to grade, and install a new bridge.

Once the bridge is installed, the contractor will re-build the road prism, and provide erosion control on the new fill slopes, and re-surface the road. Disturbed sites will be revegetated using a combination of seeding and mulching, and planting with native species.

Excavators, dozers, and dump trucks will be used primarily for project work, but a crane (for bridge placement), and a compacting roller and a grader for final road surfacing may also be used as needed. FSR 246 will experience temporary road closures during project implementation for safety reasons. Closures will be posted with signs and a press release will be issued to notify the public about impending closures and potential detours.

Design Criteria include, but are not limited to:

- Time instream work to avoid high flows.
- The contractor will submit a plan for controlling sedimentation during construction activity. The "Erosion Control Plan" must address construction activities that have the potential for stream sedimentation.
- Project designs will address control of surface run-off from the road and adjacent slopes in the vicinity of the replacement culvert. Wherever possible, run-off will be controlled so that it does not run directly into the stream.
- Embankments will be compacted in layers using a roller or other acceptable compaction equipment. The compaction equipment must be operated over the full width of each layer until visible deformation of the layer ceases or at least three complete passes.
- Fill slopes will be laid back to 1.5:1 or the angle of repose of the fill material above replacement culverts.
- Equipment will be cleaned, prior to arriving at the project site, to remove all dirt and plant parts to ensure that noxious weeds and aquatic invasive species are not brought to the site.
- Equipment used for instream work shall be cleaned of external oil, grease, dirt and mud; and leaks repaired; prior to arriving at the project site.
- Equipment will be inspected daily for leaks or accumulations of grease, and identified problems corrected before entering streams or areas that drain directly to streams or wetlands.
- Equipment used for in-stream or riparian work (including chainsaws and other hand-power tools) shall be fueled and serviced in an area that will not deliver fuel, oil, etc. to streams.
- The contractor will have fuel spill containment supplies onsite in the event of a fuel spill and their employees trained in the proper application and use of those materials.

Project Implementation: The project will likely be implemented in 2018. Project work will take place during the low water flow period, generally between July and the end of September. It's estimated that each culvert removal/bridge installation will take 8-10 weeks to complete.

III. Rationale for Decision and Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Decision

A. Category of Exclusion and Rationale for Using the Category

Based on information in this document and the project record, I have determined this project is not significant in either context or intensity (40 CFR 1508.27), that no extraordinary circumstances affecting resource conditions exist (36 CFR 220.6), that this project may be categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS, and that it meets all the criteria outlined in 36 CFR 220.6(d)(6): *Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction.*

The rationale for my decision is based on: (1) the proposed action fully meeting the criteria for Categorical Exclusions, (2) the proposed action meeting the purpose and need, (3) the findings related to extraordinary circumstances, (4) the project's consistency with laws and regulations, (5) the on-the-ground review and discussion with District resource specialists, and (6) my review of the Biological Assessments (BA), Biological Evaluations (BE), and specialists' reports.

B. Finding of the Absence of Significant Adverse Effects to Extraordinary Circumstances

Based on the findings for resource conditions described below, I have determined that no extraordinary circumstances are associated with my decision. Forest Service direction at 36 CFR 220.6(b) describes the resource conditions that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstance related to the proposed action warrant further analysis and documentation in an EIS or EA.

Additionally, 36 CFR 220.6(b) states, "*The mere presence of one of more of these resource conditions does not preclude use of a categorical exclusion. It is the existence of a cause-effect relationship between a proposed action and the potential effect on these resource conditions and if such a relationship exists, the degree of the potential effect of a proposed action on these resource conditions that determines whether extraordinary circumstances exist.*"

1. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat or Forest Service sensitive species.

The Forest Interdisciplinary (ID) Team Wildlife Biologist, Fisheries Biologist and Botanist have determined the project would have no significant effects to federally listed and R1 Sensitive wildlife, fish and plant species and/or their habitats. Therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified for these resources.

2. Floodplains, wetlands or municipal watersheds.

The proposed action is expected to have no significant effects to floodplains, wetlands or municipal watersheds. The project would have beneficial effects to water resources as it will prevent potential sediment loading from road failure. The proposed project is consistent with all applicable State and Federal water quality laws for water resources. The activities are also consistent with soil and water standards in the Clearwater National Forest Plan, including the PACFISH amendment. Based on this analysis, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to floodplains, wetlands, and municipal watersheds.

3. Congressionally designated areas, such as Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas or National Recreation Areas.

The project area is not located in any congressionally designated area, and therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to these resources.

4. Inventoried Roadless areas or potential wilderness areas.

The project is not located in any inventoried or potential wilderness area and therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to this resource.

5. Research Natural Areas.

The proposed activities is not within to any Research Natural Areas.

6. American Indians and Alaska native religious or cultural sites.

The Forest Cultural Resource Specialist has determined the above project has little likelihood to adversely affect cultural properties. As a result, a *No Inventory Decision* has been made. Therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to native religious or cultural sites.

7. Archaeological sites or historical properties or areas.

The Idaho State Historic Preservation Officer, or the Forest Archaeologist via the use of the North Idaho Programmatic Agreement, has determined that no archaeological or historic property will be adversely affected by this project. Therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to these resources.

IV. Interested and Affected Agencies, Organizations, and Persons Contacted

The proposed action – replacement of culverts – is considered limited in context and intensity, and therefore scoping was conducted internally on the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests. The Small NEPA Interdisciplinary Team was scoped on October 11, 2017 with no significant effects or extraordinary circumstances identified.

V. Findings Required by other Laws

Based on my review of the actions associated with this project, I find that the North Fork Aspen Regeneration Project is consistent with applicable Federal, state and local laws and regulations, including the standards and guidelines contained in the 1987 Clearwater National Forest Plan, as amended, as required by the National Forest Management Act of 1976.

VI. Contact Person

Questions regarding this decision should be sent to Jeff Chynoweth, Small NEPA Team Planner, c/o Nez Perce – Clearwater Supervisor's Office, 903 Third Street, Kamiah, Idaho 83536 or by telephone to (208) 935-4260 or FAX at (208) 935-4275 during business hours (M-F, excluding Federal holidays, 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., PST).

VII. Signature of Deciding Officer



ANDREW M. SKOWLUND

District Ranger
North Fork Ranger District

11/30/17
Date

cc: Travis Mechling

Enclosures (1): Map



Map for the Washington Creek Culvert Replacement Project

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